



**U.S. Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Western District of Texas**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Shana Jones, Special Assistant to US Attorney
Daryl Fields, Public Affairs Officer
610 N.W. Loop 410
San Antonio, Texas 78216
(210) 384-7452

October 26, 2006

**EIGHT FORMER SOUTHWEST AIRLINES EMPLOYEES
PLEAD GUILTY IN FRAUDULENT TICKETS SCAM**

United States Attorney Johnny Sutton and Federal Bureau of Investigation Special Agent in Charge Manuel E. Mora announced that in El Paso, eight former Southwest Airlines employees who faced federal wire fraud charges in connection with a scheme to steal in excess of \$1 million from the airline have all plead guilty.

In March 2006, a federal grand jury indictment charged Richard De La Paz, Jr., Michelle Christine Torres, Denise Nunez, Oscar Enrique Ortiz, Melissa Rene Lampton and Barbara Ann Wilson with conspiracy to commit wire fraud and three substantive wire fraud charges. In addition, Salena Corinne De La Torre and Guillermo Enriquez are charged with three counts of wire fraud.

"These Southwest Airlines employees were ripping off their employer to a tune that was more than just peanuts," stated United States Attorney Johnny Sutton.

The following defendants plead to Conspiracy to Commit Wire Fraud and face a maximum five year sentence and \$250,000 fine. The government is seeking restitution in excess of \$1,000,000.00 from these defendants.

Richard De La Paz, Jr.	October 26, 2006	January 17, 2007
Michelle Christine Torres	October 19, 2006	January 10, 2007
Oscar Enrique Ortiz	August 4, 2006	November 7, 2006
Melissa Renee Lampton	August 29, 2006	November 20, 2006
Denise Nunez	October 6, 2006	December 29, 2006

Defendant Guillermo Enriquez plead guilty to one count of wire fraud. He was sentenced on September 21st, 2006 to 6 months of home confinement, 4 years of probation, and ordered to pay restitution of \$45,006.00.

Defendants Barbara Wilson and Selena De La Torre who stole \$5,000 and \$3,000 respectively have repaid the victim and are in pre-trial diversion programs.

– more –

Had this case proceeded to trial, the government was prepared to prove that from March 2000 through January 2003, De La Paz, Torres, Ortiz, Lampton, Nunez and Wilson sold passenger tickets at SWA's El Paso, Texas, station. During the course of business, used SWA tickets collected by agents are supposed to be placed in envelopes and sent to the company's accounting firm. The indictment alleges that the defendants intercepted used airline tickets and reused them in subsequent cash ticket transactions. After the transaction, the defendants would pocket the cash representing the value of the used ticket. While not charged in the conspiracy count, the indictment further alleges that De La Torre and Enriquez carried out the same scheme independently during their tenure with Southwest Airlines; De La Torre, from February 2001 to July 2001 and Enriquez, from January 2000 to August 2002.

This case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Assistant United States Attorney William F. Lewis, Jr., is prosecuting this case on behalf of the Government.

#####